

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Tessa Moore. I am from Westport and a supporter of CT Against Gun Violence. I am a member of Students Demand Action at Staples, a branch of Everytown for Gun Safety, that advocates for common sense gun legislation as well as community awareness and education about gun violence.

I am testifying in favor of HB-6355, An Act Concerning Risk Protection Orders.

I have not personally experienced the dangers of guns, but I have seen and heard about the ways in which they can impact people's lives and families. A close friend of my family lost her brother due to a familial dispute in which a gun was involved. I have heard numerous stories about people who have gone through tough times in their lives, which they tragically ended using a firearm. These people's stories might have been different had those around them been able to limit their access to a deadly weapon.

Although closure or limited occupancy of schools and other public places due to Covid-19 has reduced occurrences of mass shootings, the risks of firearms are ever present. The lockdown, though necessary, has led to an increase in domestic violence and suicide rates in many parts of the world. It is more important than ever to pass this bill, which will help to prevent people from using guns to harm themselves or others.

HB-6355 is an essential modification to the current ERPO law for several reasons. First, it will ensure by court hearing that a person no longer poses a danger before firearms are returned, instead of returning them at expiration of the order. It will allow ERPOs to prohibit those at risk of harming themselves or others from purchasing a firearm in the first place, when currently they can only be issued for those currently in possession of one. It will permit family and household members as well as healthcare professionals to directly petition the court for a risk protection order, an essential change as currently only law enforcement and states' attorneys can do this, making the process more difficult. Finally, this bill will require the court to make available educational materials explaining the process of filing these orders and making it simpler for petitioners. All of these measures, I believe, are common sense additions to the law that will further reduce gun deaths by strengthening the current legislation and making risk protection orders more accessible and effective.

ERPOs have proven their ability to save lives. According to a 2017 study by Duke, Yale, and UCONN, for every 10 to 20 risk protection orders issued in Connecticut, one suicide is prevented. These orders are a last resort means to temporarily remove guns from dangerous persons when voluntary measures fail. They are fully in line with due process and have held up in court on various occasions. Risk protection orders are used for the protection of those in possession of a gun and those around them. It is crucial that they are accessible to those who know them best, as 80 percent of people considering suicide give some sign of their plans, and perpetrators of mass shootings display on average four to five observable concerning behaviors over time. It is also crucial that additions are made to this law that will further reduce the opportunities for individuals who are at risk or in a dangerous state to cause harm with a gun.

I ask that you favorably report HB-6355 out of committee so that the General Assembly can vote to strengthen our Extreme Risk Protection law so that it works harder to

prevent firearm suicide and homicide. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tessa Moore  
Westport, CT